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PEACE PROPOSALS AND THE ATTITUDE OF THE ALLIES

Speech by the Prime Minister,
The Right Hon. D. LLOYD GEORGE,
On December 19th, 1916

LONDON :
HAYMAN, CHRISTY & LILLY, LTD.
113-117, FARRINGDON ROAD, E.C.

1916

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THE RIGHT HON. DAVID LLOYD GEORGE,
Prime Minister.

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PEACE PROPOSALS AND THE ATTITUDE OF THE ALLIES.

Speech by the Prime Minister,

ON DECEMBER 19TH, 1916.

I am afraid I shall have to claim the indulgence of the House in making the observations which I have to make in moving the Second Reading of this Bill. I am still suffering a little from my throat. I appear before the House of Commons to-day, with the most terrible responsibility that can fall upon the shoulders of any living man, as the chief adviser of the Crown, in the most gigantic War in which the country has ever been engaged—a War upon the event of which its destiny depends. It is the greatest War ever waged. The burdens are the heaviest that have been cast upon this or any other country, and the issues which hang on to it are the gravest that have been attached to any conflict in which humanity has ever been involved. The responsibilities of the new Government have been suddenly accentuated by a declaration made by the German Chancellor, and I propose to deal with that at once. The statement made by him in the German Reichstag has been followed by a Note presented to us by the United States of America without any note or comment. The answer that will be given by the Government will be given in full accord with all our brave Allies. Naturally, there has been an interchange of views, not upon the Note, because it only recently arrived, but upon the speech which propelled it, and, inasmuch as the Note itself is practically only a reproduction, or certainly a paraphrase of the speech, the subject matter of the Note itself has been discussed informally between the Allies, and I am very glad to be able to state that we have each of us separately and independently arrived at identical conclusions.

I am very glad that the first answer that was given to the statement of the German Chancellor was given by France and by Russia. They have the unquestionable right to give the first answer to such an invitation. The enemy is still on their soil; their sacrifices have been greater. The answer they have given has already appeared in all the papers, and I simply stand here to-day, on behalf of the Government, to give clear and definite support to the statement which they have already made. Let us examine what the statement is, and examine it calmly. Any man or set of men who wantonly, or without sufficient cause, prolonged a terrible conflict like this would have on his soul a crime that oceans could not cleanse. Upon the other hand, it is equally true that any man or set of men who out of a sense of weariness or despair abandoned the struggle without achieving the high purpose for which we had entered into it being nearly fulfilled would have been guilty of the costliest act of poltroonery ever perpetrated by any statesman. I should like to quote the very well-known words of Abraham Lincoln under similar conditions :

“We accepted this War for an object, and a worthy object, and the War will end when that object is attained. Under God I hope it will never end until that time.”

Are we likely to achieve that object by accepting the invitation of the German Chancellor? That is the only question we have to put to ourselves. There has been some talk about proposals of peace. What are the proposals? There are none. To enter at the invitation of Germany, proclaiming herself victorious, without any knowledge of the proposals she proposes to make, into a conference, is to put our heads into a noose with the rope end in the hands of Germany. This country is not altogether without experience in these matters. This is not the first time we have fought a great military despotism that was overshadowing Europe, and it will not be the first time we shall have helped to overthrow military despotism. We have an uncomfortable historical memory of these things, and we can recall when one of the greatest of these despots had a purpose to serve in the working of his nefarious schemes. His favourite device was to appear in the garb of the angel of peace. He usually appeared under two conditions. Firstly, when he wished for time to assimilate his conquests, or to reorganise his forces for fresh conquests; and, secondly, when his subjects showed symptoms of fatigue and war weariness, and invariably the appeal was always made in the name of humanity; and he demanded an end to bloodshed at which he professed himself to be horrified, but for which he himself was mainly responsible. Our ancestors were taken in once, and bitterly they and Europe rued it. The time was devoted to reorganising his forces for a deadlier attack than ever upon the liberties of Europe, and examples of that kind cause us to regard this Note

with a considerable measure of reminiscent disquiet. (We feel that we ought to know before we can give favourable consideration to such an invitation that Germany is prepared to accede to the only terms on which it is possible for peace to be obtained and maintained in Europe. What are those terms?) They have been repeatedly stated by all the leading statesmen of the Allies. My right hon. Friend has stated them repeatedly here and outside, and all I can do is to quote, as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House did last week, practically the statement of the terms put forward by my right hon. Friend :

“Restitution, reparation, guarantee against repetition,”

so that there shall be no mistake, and it is important that there should be no mistake in a matter of life and death to millions. Let me repeat again—complete restitution, full reparation, effectual guarantees. Did the German Chancellor use a single phrase to indicate that he was prepared to concede such terms? Was there a hint of restitution? Was there any suggestion of reparation? Was there any indication of any security for the future that this outrage on civilisation would not be again perpetrated at the first profitable opportunity? The very substance and style of the speech constitutes a denial of peace on the only terms on which peace is possible. He is not even conscious now that Germany has committed any offence against the rights of free nations. Listen to this from the Note :

“Not for an instant have they (they being the Central Powers) swerved from the conviction that the respect of rights of other nations is not in any degree compatible with their own rights and legitimate interests.”

When did they discover that? Where was the respect for the rights of other nations in Belgium and Serbia? Oh, that was self-defence! Menaced, I suppose, by the overwhelming armies of Belgium, the Germans had been intimidated into invading that country, to the burning of Belgian cities and villages, to the massacring of thousands of inhabitants, old and young, to the carrying of the survivors into bondage; yea, and they were carrying them into slavery at the very moment when this precious Note was being written about the unswerving conviction as to the respect of the rights of other nations! I suppose these outrages are the legitimate interests of Germany? We must know. That is not the mood of peace. If excuses of this kind for palpable crimes can be put forward two and a-half years after the exposure by grim facts of the guarantee, is there, I ask in all solemnity, any guarantee that similar subterfuges will not be used in the future to overthrow any treaty of peace you may enter into with Prussian militarism? (This Note and that speech proves that not yet have they learned the very

alphabet of respect for the rights of others. Without reparation, peace is impossible. Are all these outrages against humanity on land and on sea to be liquidated by a few pious phrases about humanity? Is there to be no reckoning for them? Are we to grasp the hand that perpetrated these atrocities in friendship without any reparation being tendered or given? I am told that we are to begin, Germany helping us, to exact reparation for all future violence committed after the War. We have begun already. It has already cost us so much, and we must exact it now so as not to leave such a grim inheritance to our children. Much as we all long for peace, deeply as we are horrified with war, this Note and the speech which propelled it afford us small encouragement and hope for an honourable and lasting compact.

What hope is there given by that speech that the whole root and cause of this great bitterness, the arrogant spirit of the Prussian military caste, will not be as dominant as ever if we patch up a peace now? Why, the very speech in what these peace suggestions are made resounds with the boasts of Prussian military triumphs of victory. It is a long paean over the victory of Von Hindenburg and his legions. This very appeal for peace is delivered ostentatiously from the triumphant chariot of Prussian militarism. We must keep a steadfast eye upon the purpose for which we entered the War, otherwise the great sacrifices we have been making will be all in vain. The German Note states that it was for the defence of their existence and the freedom of national development that the Central Powers were constrained to take up arms. Such phrases cannot even deceive those who pen them. They are intended to delude the German nation into supporting the designs of the Prussian military caste. Whoever wishes to put an end to their existence and the freedom of their national development? We welcomed their development as long as it was on the paths of peace. The greater their development upon that road, the greater will all humanity be enriched by their efforts. That was not our design, and it is not our purpose now. The Allies entered this War to defend themselves against the aggression of the Prussian military domination, and having begun it, they must insist that it can only end with the most complete and effective guarantee against the possibility of that caste ever again disturbing the peace of Europe. Prussia, since she got into the hands of that caste, has been a bad neighbour, arrogant, threatening, bullying, litigious, shifting boundaries at her will, taking one fair field after another from weaker neighbours, and adding them to her own domain with her belt ostentatiously full of weapons of offence, and ready at a moment's notice to use them. She has always been an unpleasant, disturbing neighbour in Europe, and no wonder that the Prussians got thoroughly on the nerves of Europe. There was no peace near where she dwelt.

It is difficult for those who were fortunate enough to live thousands of miles away to understand what it has meant to those who lived near their boundaries. Even here, with the protection of the broad seas between us, we know what a disturbing factor the Prussians were with their constant naval menace, but even we can hardly realise what it has meant to France and to Russia. Several times there were threats directed to them within the lifetime of this generation which presented the alternative of war or humiliation. There were many of us who hoped that internal influence in Germany would have been strong enough to check and ultimately to eliminate this hectoring. All our hopes proved illusory, and now that this great War has been forced by the Prussian military leaders upon France, Russia, Italy, and ourselves, it would be folly, it would be cruel folly, not to see to it that this swashbuckling through the streets of Europe to the disturbance of all harmless and peaceful citizens should be dealt with now as an offence against the law of nations. The mere word that led Belgium to her own destruction will not satisfy Europe any more. We all believed it. We all trusted it. It gave way at the first pressure of temptation, and Europe has been plunged into this vortex of blood. [We will, therefore, wait until we hear what terms and guarantees the German Government offer other than those, better than those, surer than those which she so lightly broke, and meanwhile we shall put our trust in an unbroken Army rather than in a broken faith. For the moment, I do not think it would be advisable for me to add anything upon this particular invitation. A formal reply will be delivered by the Allies in the course of the next few days.]

I shall therefore proceed with the other part of the task which I have in front of me. What is the urgent task in front of the Government? To complete and make even more effective the mobilisation of all our national resources, a mobilisation which has been going on since the commencement of the War, so as to enable the nation to bear the strain, however prolonged, and to march through to victory, however lengthy, and however exhausting may be the journey. It is a gigantic task, and let me give this word of warning: If there be any who have given their confidence to the new Administration in expectation of a speedy victory, they will be doomed to disappointment. I am not going to paint a gloomy picture of the military situation—if I did, it would not be a true picture—but I must paint a stern picture, because that accurately represents the facts. I have always insisted on the nation being taught to realise the actual facts of this War. I have attached enormous importance to that at the risk of being characterised as a pessimist. I believe that a good many of our misunderstandings have arisen from exaggerated views which have been taken about successes and from a disposition to treat as trifling real set backs. To imagine that you can only get the support and the help, and the best help, of a strong people by concealing

difficulties is to show a fundamental misconception. The British people possess as sweet a tooth as anybody and they like pleasant things put on the table, but that is not the stuff that they have been brought up on. That is not what the British Empire has been nourished on. Britain has never shown at its best except when it was confronted with a real danger and understood it.

Let us for a moment look at the worst. The Roumanian blunder was an unfortunate one, but at worst it prolongs the War; it does not alter the fundamental facts of the War. I cannot help hoping that it may even have a salutary effect in calling the attention of the Allies to obvious defects in their organisation, not merely the organisation of each but the organisation of the whole, and if it does that and braces them up to fresh effort it may prove, bad as it is, a blessing. That is the worst. That has been a real set back. It is the one cloud—well, it is the darkest cloud—and it is a cloud that appeared on a clearing horizon. We are doing our best to make it impossible that that disaster shall lead to worse. That is why we have taken in the last few days very strong action in Greece. We mean to take no risks there. We have decided to take definite and decisive action, and I think it has succeeded. We have decided also to recognise the agents of that great Greek Statesman, M. Venizelos.

I wanted to clear out of the way what I regarded as the worst features in the military situation, but I should like to say one word about the lesson of the fighting on the Western front, not about the military strategy but about the significance of the whole of that great struggle, one of the greatest struggles ever waged in the history of the world. It is full of encouragement and of hope. Just look at it. An absolutely new Army! The old had done its duty and spent itself in the achievement of that great task. This is a new Army. But a year ago it was ore in the earth of Britain, yea, and of Ireland. It became iron. It has passed through a fiery furnace, and the enemy knows that it is now fine steel—an absolutely new Army, new men, new officers taken from schools, boys from schools, from colleges, from counting-houses, never trained to war, never thought of war; many of them perhaps never handled a weapon of war, generals never given the opportunity of handling great masses of men! Some of us had seen the manœuvres. What would now be regarded as a division attacking a small village is more than our generals ever had the opportunity of handling before the War. Compared with the great manœuvres on the Continent, they were toy manœuvres. And yet this new Army, new men, new officers, generals new to this kind of work, they have faced the greatest army in the world, the greatest army the world has ever seen, the best equipped and the best trained, and they have beaten them, beaten them, beaten them! Battle after battle, day after day, week after week! From the strongest entrenchments ever devised by human skill they have driven them out by

valour, by valour which is incredible when you read the story of it.

There is something which gives you hope, which fills you with pride in the nation to which they belong. It is a fact, and it is a fact full of significance for us—and for the foe. It is part of his reckoning as well. He has seen that Army grow and proved under his very eyes. A great French general said to me, "Your Army is a new Army. It must learn, not merely generals, not merely officers, but the men must learn not merely what to do, but how and when to do it." They are becoming veterans, and therefore, basing our confidence upon these facts, I am as convinced as I ever was of ultimate victory if the nation proves as steady, as valorous, as ready to sacrifice and as ready to learn and to endure as that great Army of our sons in France. That is all I shall say at the present moment about the military situation.

I should like now to say a word or two about the Government itself, and, in doing so, I am anxious to avoid all issues that excite irritation or controversy or disunion. This is not a time for that. But it must not be assumed, if I do so, that I accept as complete the accounts which have been given of the way in which the Government was formed. My attitude towards the policy of the late Administration, of which I was a member and for all whose deeds I am just as responsible as any one of them, has been given in letters and memoranda, and my reasons for leaving have also been given in a letter. If it were necessary, I should have, on personal grounds, welcomed its publication, but I am convinced that controversies as to the past will not help us as to the future, and therefore, as far as I am concerned, I place them on one side and go on with what I regard as the business of the Government under these trying conditions. I should like to say something, first of all, as to the unusual character and composition of the Government as an executive body.

The House has realised that there has been a separation between the functions of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the House. That was because we came to the conclusion that it was more than any one man, whatever his energy or physical strength might be, could do to undertake both functions in the middle of a great war. The task of the Leader of the House is a very anxious and absorbing task, even in war. I have not been able to attend the House very much myself during the last two or three years, but I have been here often enough to realise that the task of the Leader of the House of Commons is not a sinecure even in a war—friends of mine took care that it should not be so. So much for that point. Now there are three characteristics in the present Administration in which it may be said it has departed, perhaps, from precedent. First of all, there is the concentration of the Executive in a very few hands; the second is the choosing of men of administrative and business capacity rather than men of Parliamentary experience, where we were unable to

obtain both for the headship of a great Department; and the third is a franker and fuller recognition of the partnership of Labour in the Government of this country. No Government that has ever been formed to rule this country has had such a share—such a number of men who all their lives have been associated with labour and with the labour organisations of this country. We realised that it is impossible to conduct war without getting the complete and unqualified support of Labour, and we were anxious to obtain their assistance and their counsel for the purpose of the conduct of the War.

The fact that this is a different kind of organisation to any that preceded it is not a criticism upon its predecessors—not necessarily. They were peace structures. They were organised for a different purpose and a different condition of things. The kind of craft you have for river or canal traffic is not exactly the kind of vessel you construct for the high seas. I have no doubt that the old Cabinets—I am not referring to the last Cabinet—I am referring to the old system of Cabinets, where the heads of every Department were represented inside the Cabinet—I have no doubt that the old Cabinets were better adapted to navigate the Parliamentary river with its shoals and shifting sands, and perhaps for a cruise in home waters. But a Cabinet of twenty-three is rather top-heavy for a gale. I do not say that this particular craft is best adapted for Parliamentary navigation, but I am convinced it is the best for the War, in which you want quick decision above everything. Look at the last two and a-half years. I am not referring to what has happened in this country. When I say these things I would rather the House of Commons looked at the War as a whole, and took the concerns of the Allies as a whole. We are all perfectly certain, and I shall have the assent of my right hon. Friend in this, that the Allies have suffered disaster after disaster through tardiness of decision and action, very largely for reasons I shall give later on. I know in this I am in complete agreement with my right hon. Friend. It is true that in a multitude of counsellors there is wisdom. That was written for Oriental countries in peace times. You cannot run a war with a Sanhedrim. That is the meaning of the Cabinet of five, with one of its members doing sentry duty outside, manning the walls, and defending the Council Chamber against attack while we are trying to do our work inside.

Some concern has been expressed at the relationship of this small executive to other members. It has been suggested there is danger of lack of co-ordination and common direction. It has been wondered how we can ever meet: one very respectable newspaper suggests there ought to be weekly dinners to discuss matters of common concern. What is the difficulty? Whenever anything concerns a particular Department you follow precedent. This is not the first time you have had heads of Departments outside the Cabinet. As a matter of fact, the practice of putting every head of a Department inside the Cabinet

is quite a modern innovation, and the way in which Governments have been in the habit of dealing with that situation is whenever there is anything that concerns a particular Department, the head of that Department, with his officers, attends the executive Committee and you immediately get into contact with each other and discuss those problems which require solution. That is an old practice. I think it is a very effective practice. It is very much better, especially in time of war, than keeping men away from their Departments discussing things which do not directly concern them. But while undoubtedly their counsel may be very valuable, when you have a considerable number of people brought together you are apt to create confusion and thus to delay decision. There is another point of departure and another change, and that is the amalgamation of the old War Committee with the Cabinet. The old War Committee had what the Cabinet had not, it had secretaries to keep a complete record of all decisions, and this no Cabinet has ever had. They were always a question of memory. That is the real difference between the War Committee and the Cabinet. In the War Committee a full record was taken of every decision, and the minutes were sent round to each member for correction. The matters dealt with there were just as confidential—I might even say more confidential—than the vast majority of questions decided in the Cabinet. Henceforth there will be no distinction between your War Committee and your War Cabinet. The secretary will always be there; we propose to strengthen his staff so that we might have more direct means of communication and a more organised means of communication between the Cabinet and various Departments than you have ever had in the past. I come now to the other point, which has caused some misgiving. There seems to be a little concern lest the new organisation should have the effect of lessening Parliamentary control. I wonder why on earth it would do that? Each Minister answers for his Department exactly in the same way as under the old system. Each Minister is accountable for his Department to Parliament, and the Government as a whole are accountable to Parliament. The control of Parliament as a whole must, and always must, be supreme because it represents the nation. There is not the slightest attempt here to derogate in any particular from the complete control of Parliament. I do not think the present methods of Parliamentary control are efficient, but that is not a change which has come about through the new Administration. I have always thought that the methods of Parliamentary control—and I speak here as a fairly old Parliamentarian—rather tended to give undue prominence to trivialities—my right hon. Friend and I have talked over this matter many a time—and on the other hand that it rather tended to minimise and ignore realities. Whether you can improve upon that I personally have never had any doubt, but I have always thought—I do not know whether I carry anyone with me on

this except my hon. Friend who sits there—that the French system was a more effective one—the system whereby Ministers have to appear before Parliamentary Committees, where questions can be asked them, and where they can give an answer which they would not care to give in public. I think that in many respects that system has helped to save France from one or two very serious blunders. I am not committing the Government to that beyond this, that we are investigating that question. It is just possible we might refer the matter to Parliament to settle for itself, because it is not so much a question for the Government as a question for Parliament itself to decide, subject, of course, to any criticism or suggestion which the Government might wish to make, as to the best and most efficient methods during a period of War of exercising Parliamentary control over the Departments. Now I come to the work of the Government, which the Government is cutting out for itself. I had hoped to be able to tell the House of Commons a good deal more upon three or four very vital matters than I am in a position to do owing to reasons over which I have no control. I have not been able to confer with heads of Departments nor with my Friends in the Cabinet, and therefore two or three questions upon which I should have liked to pronounce decisions to-day I am not in a position, unfortunately, to do so. My right hon. Friends yesterday—the Home Secretary, in introducing a Bill, and the Leader of the House subsequently—gave a very detailed account of the probable working of the new Ministries, and therefore I shall have very little to say with regard to these. Take the Ministry of Labour. It has been urged for thirty years by organised labour in this country, and my experience in the Ministry of Munitions has taught me this, that it was desirable there should be a Department which was not altogether in the position of employer to employed to those who were concerned whenever there was a dispute about labour conditions or wages; but I hope that this Department will not confine itself merely to the settling of disputes. That is but a small part of the whole industrial problem, which I hope this Ministry will assist in solving. I hope it will become in a real sense a Ministry with the well-being of labour in its charge. In the Munitions Department I had the privilege of setting up something that was known as a Welfare Department, which was an attempt to take advantage of the present malleability of industry, in order to impress upon it more humanitarian conditions, to make labour less squalid and less repellent, and more attractive and more healthy. A number of very able volunteers are organising that Department, and I am glad to be able to say about some of them that they belong to the Society of Friends and have had a rooted objection to war, which is due to the creed they profess—no one has doubted their sincerity—but they have never carried it so far as to say that during a War they should take no part in any national burden;

and they are working hard in this Department. Then I am hoping that this Department will take a leading part in assisting in the mobilisation of labour for the purposes of the War, a matter to which I shall refer later on. I think my right hon. Friend has already indicated to the House what we propose to do with regard to shipping. It was never so vital to the life of the nation as it is at the present moment during the War. It is the jugular vein, which, if severed, would destroy the life of the nation, and the Government felt the time had come for taking over more complete control of all the ships of this country and placing them in practically the same position as are the railways of the country at the present moment; so that during the War shipping will be nationalised in the real sense of the term. The prodigious profits which were made out of freights were contributing in no small measure to the high cost of commodities, and I always found not only that, but that they were making it difficult for us in our task with labour. Whenever I met organised labour under any conditions where I would persuade them to give up privileges, I always had hurled at me phrases about the undue and extravagant profits of shipping. This is intolerable in war-time, when so many are making so great sacrifices for the State. Sir Joseph MacLay, one of the ablest shipowners in the United Kingdom, has undertaken to direct this great enterprise with one sole object—the service of the country. He is now conferring with the Admiralty and the very able Shipping Control Committee over which Lord Cuxzon presided, and I hope I shall be in a position to inform the House of the plans and projects he recommends should be taken not merely for the more effective nationalisation of the ships which we have already on the register, but the speedy construction of more, so as to make up the wastage which, I fear, is inevitable in any great war, especially when you are dealing with such piratical methods as those which have characterised the maritime policy of the German Empire. With regard to mines, here the Government also feel, as the late Government did, that they are dealing with an essential commodity which is the very life of industry. It is an essential ingredient to our military and industrial efficiency, and we ought to assume more direct control over not merely one coalfield, but over the whole industry. The conditions are being carefully considered and will be stated to the House of Commons, but I am not sure whether we can place our plans before it before we separate. Now I feel I must say something about the food problem. It is undoubtedly serious, and will be grave unless not merely the Government but the nation is prepared to grapple with it courageously without loss of time. The main facts are fairly well known. The available harvests of the world have failed. Take Canada and the United States of America. As compared with last year the harvests were hundreds of millions of bushels down, and that means that the surplus available for sale abroad is

diminished to an extent which is disastrous. In times of peace we can always make up the deficiency in any particular country by resorting to another. If America failed there was Russia or the Argentine—but the Argentine promises badly—and Australia. Russia is not available; Australia means almost prohibitive transport. When we come to our own harvest, which is not a mean ingredient in the whole, not merely was the harvest a poor one, but, what is still more serious, during the time when the winter wheat ought to have been sown the weather was almost prohibitive, if not altogether, and I do not believe more than three-eighths of the usual sowing has taken place. Let us clearly understand what it means. Let us get to the bottom of this. Unless the nation knows what it means you cannot ask them to do their duty. It is true that to a certain extent you can make up by the spring sowing, but as any agriculturist knows, that never produces anything comparable to the winter sowing.

Those are the main features so far as the harvest is concerned. We have always got the submarine menace, which, in this respect, is not the most important one to consider. Under these conditions, it was decided by the late Government to appoint a Food Controller, and we have actually appointed him—an able, experienced administrator, especially in these matters, and a man of great determination and force of character. He is assisted by the ablest experts in this House. We always know the quality of a man by opposing him for years, and my hon. Friend (Captain Bathurst) many a time found it to be his duty to make himself very active on Bills which I had the burden of carrying through this House, so that I know something about his qualities. At the head of the Board of Agriculture we have a man who is singularly gifted and who has as thorough a knowledge of the principles and the practices of this question as any man in this or any other country. I felt it important that we should secure the very best brains in the country to bear upon this very difficult and very dangerous problem. The problem is a double one; it is one of distribution and of production. In respect of both, we must call upon the people of this country to make real sacrifices, but it is essential, when we do so, that the sacrifices should be equal. The over-consumption by the affluent must not be allowed to create a shortage for the less well-to-do. I am sure we can depend upon men and women of all conditions—to use an ordinary phrase which I am sure the House will allow me to use, because it is thoroughly well understood—I hope we can appeal to men and women of all ranks and conditions to play the game. Any sort of concealment hurts the nation. It hurts it when it is fighting for its life. Therefore we must appeal to the nation as a whole, men and women—without the help of the whole nation we can accomplish nothing—to assist us to so distribute our resources that there shall be no man, woman, or child

ERRATUM.

Page 14, line 10 from top, for “three-eighths” read *three-fifths*.

who will be suffering from hunger because someone else has been getting too much.

When you come to production, every available square yard must be made to produce food. The labour available for tillage should not be turned to more ornamental purposes until the food necessities of the country have been adequately safeguarded. The best use must be made of land and of labour to increase the food supplies of this country—corn, potatoes, and all kinds of food products. All those who have the opportunity must feel it is their duty to the State to assist in producing and in contributing to the common stock, upon which everybody can draw. If they do this, we shall get food without any privation, without any want, everybody having plenty of the best and healthiest food. By that means and that means alone will the nation be able to carry through the War to that triumphal issue to which we are all looking forward. It means sacrifice. But what sacrifice? Talk to a man who has returned from the horrors of the Somme, or who has been through the haunting wretchedness of a winter campaign, and you will know something of what those gallant men are enduring for their country. They are enduring much, they are hazard-ing all, whilst we are living in comfort and security at home. You cannot have absolute equality of sacrifice. In a war that is impossible, but you can have equal readiness to sacrifice from all. There are hundreds of thousands who have given their lives, there are millions who have given up comfortable homes and exchanged them for a daily communion with death; multitudes have given up those whom they love best. Let the nation as a whole place its comforts, its luxuries, its indulgences, its elegances on a national altar consecrated by such sacrifices as these men have made. Let us proclaim during the War a national Lent. The nation will be better and stronger for it, mentally and morally as well as physically. It will strengthen its fibre, it will ennoble its spirit. Without it we shall not get the full benefit of this struggle. Our Armies might drive the enemy out of the battered villages of France, across the devastated plains of Belgium; they might hurl them across the Rhine in battered disarray, but unless the nation as a whole shoulders part of the burden of victory it will not profit by the triumph, for it is not what a nation gains, it is what a nation gives that makes it great.

While the nation is making such enormous sacrifices as those I have already pointed out, it is intolerable that any section should be permitted to make exceptional profits out of those sacrifices and by that means actually increase the burdens borne by others. A good deal has already been done by the late Administration to arrest unfair private profiteering out of the War. The Government have come to the conclusion that they cannot ask the nation for more sacrifices without even more drastic steps yet being taken. There are several ways of dealing with this problem. One is the annexation of all war profits;

another is the cutting down of prices so as to make excessive profits impossible. The Munitions Act adopted both of those expedients. Eighty per cent. of the profits in controlled firms were annexed. In addition to that, there has been a most searching and minute revision of prices in the controlled firms, and enormous reductions have already been achieved in those firms. The problem is now being carefully examined by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and others, and we hope to be able to make an announcement shortly as to the course the Government intend to adopt. It is quite clear that if the nation must be asked to make further sacrifices in order to win the War, the road should be cleared by action of this kind.

I now come to an even more difficult subject, one which is equally vital to the success of this country in this great War. I have hitherto talked largely of the mobilisation of the material resources of the nation. I now come to the mobilisation of the labour reserves of the country, which are even more vital to our success than the former. Without this—let us make no mistake—we shall not be able to pull through. It is not the mere haphazard law of supply and demand that will accomplish that which is necessary to save the nation within the time that it is essential it should be accomplished. It is not a question of years. It is a question of months, perhaps of weeks. Unless not merely the material resources of the country but the labour of the country is used to the best advantage, and every man is called upon to render such service to the State as he can best give, victory is beyond our reach. The problem with which we are confronted is a difficult one. Nearly a year ago we decided that in order to maintain our Armies in the field the nation must have complete control over all its military resources in men. But it is impossible to take men into the Army without taking them from civil employment of greater or less utility, and it has been our object—an object that becomes more and more plain as times goes on; it was plain to the late Administration as well as to ourselves—to establish such a system of recruiting as will ensure that no man is taken into the Army who is capable of rendering more useful service in industry. To complete our plan for the organisation of all the national resources, we ought to have power to say that every man who is not taken into the Army, whatever his position or rank, really is employed on work of national importance. For instance, I was constantly appealed to as Secretary of State for War to release men for agricultural work. The Army Council and those in charge were quite prepared to do so, but there was absolutely no guarantee that, if the men were released, they would be used for agricultural purposes—not the least. The moment they were released from the Army they were free to go to munition work or to any other work where they thought they could sell their labour to the best advantage, or where they thought they could live under the most pleasant condition.

We could not ensure that these men, if released, would be used for agricultural purposes, and we were constantly confronted with these difficulties. That is one of the problems with which you must deal if the nation is to have the full benefit of such labour reserves as are still left to it. At present it is only the man who is fitted for military service, and has not established a claim for exemption on whom the nation can call. The unfit man and the exempted man are surely under the same moral obligation, but still there is no means of enforcing it. It is with this imperfect organisation of our industrial man-power that we are called upon to confront an enemy who not only exercises to the full his undoubted right over his own population, but has introduced a practice hitherto unknown to civilised warfare of removing the civilian inhabitants of occupied territory to make good the shortage of labour in his own factories. It is necessary that we should make a swift and effective answer to Germany's latest move. As our Armies grow, our needs for munitions grow. There is a large part of our labour for munition purposes which is immobile. There may be a surplus in one factory and a shortage in another. We have no power to transfer men. As the months go by the cost of the war increases. Our purchases in neutral countries become more difficult to finance, yet there may be and there are thousands of men occupied in industries which consume our wealth at home, and do nothing to strengthen our credit abroad. Yet we have no power to transfer them from employment where they are wasting our strength and their own to employments where they could increase it. We have not even the organisation necessary for utilising them as volunteers.

These are the powers which we must take, and this is the organisation which we must complete. I could dwell upon it by the illustration of agriculture. There is undoubtedly in this country a considerable number of people skilled in tillage of the soil who are not producing food, but we cannot mobilise them. We cannot direct them. I believe that there are scores, if not hundreds of thousands of people of that kind—there is no question here of military age—who, if we could utilise them to the best advantage, could produce great quantities of food in this country, but we cannot do it. Not only that. The difficulty in agriculture is the want of skilled men. You may have two or three skilled men on a particular farm, or the farmers may have no skilled men at all, yet two or three skilled men, if you could treat them as commissioned officers, could look after not merely one farm, but several farms, with the aid of unskilled men or women working under them.

I cannot in the course of a speech like this give the whole details of the plans of my right hon. Friends here, with regard to agriculture, but I can give an assurance that there are schemes of very great magnitude which have been formulated, and which are in course of being put into operation. They will involve

great local organisation throughout the country. The matter was considered by the War Committee of the late Government, and it was unanimously decided by them that the time had come for the adoption of the principle of universal national service. It was one of the first matters taken up by the present Government, and the War Cabinet have unanimously adopted the conclusions come to by the preceding War Cabinet. I believe that the plans which we have made will secure to every worker all that he has the right to ask for.

In order to do this it is proposed to appoint at once a Director of National Service, to be in charge of both the military and the civil side of universal national service. The civil and military side of the directory are to be entirely separate, and there shall be a military and a civil director responsible to the Director of National Service. The Military Director will be responsible for recruiting for the Army, and will hand over to the War Office the recruits obtained. Here I need not elaborate, because it is not proposed to make any change in recruiting for military service. As regards civilian service, it is proposed that the Director of National Service shall proceed by the scheduling of industries and of services according to their essential character during the War. Certain industries are regarded as indispensable, and the departments concerned will indent upon the Director of National Service for the labour which they require for those services, and other services will be rationed in such matters as labour, raw material, and power. Labour that is set free from non-essential and rationed industries will be available to set free potential soldiers who are at present exempted from military service and to increase the available supply of labour for essential services. This labour will be invited to enrol at once and be registered as war workers on lines analogous to the existing munitions volunteers, with similar provisions as to rates of pay and separation allowance.

I have no doubt that when it is realised how essential to the life of the nation it is that the services of every man should be put to the best use we shall secure an adequate supply of these volunteers. We are taking immediate steps to secure by this means the men we want. We shall begin as soon as may be to classify industries and invite the enrolment of volunteers. If it is found impossible to get the numbers we require—and I hope it will be possible—we shall not hesitate to come to Parliament and ask Parliament to release us from pledges given in other circumstances and to obtain the necessary power for rendering our plans fully effective. The nation is fighting for its life, and it is entitled to the best services of all its sons. We have been fortunate in inducing the Lord Mayor of Birmingham (Mr. Neville Chamberlain) to accept the position of Director-General under this scheme. It was with very great difficulty that we induced him to undertake this very onerous duty, as the task with which he is identified

in Birmingham is a matter of first-class importance to that great city, and it was only the urgent appeals made to him that induced him to undertake this great and onerous task. He will immediately proceed to organise this great new system of enrolment for industrial purposes, and I hope that before Parliament resumes its duties in another few weeks we shall be able to report that we have secured a sufficiently large industrial army in order to mobilise the whole of the labour strength of this country for war purposes.

I wish it had been possible for me to have said something to-day about Ireland. I had hoped to be able to do so, but the circumstances to which I have already referred have made it impossible for me to devote my time and attention to the problems which have arisen in that country. I have had one or two preliminary interviews with my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary, and I have made arrangements for others on certain questions, but unfortunately I have not been able to attend to this and to many other equally insistent matters in the last few days. All I should like to say is this: I wish it were possible to remove the misunderstanding between Britain and Ireland which has for centuries been such a source of misery to the one and of embarrassment and weakness to the other. Apart from the general interest which I have taken in it, I should consider that a war measure of the first importance. I should consider it a great victory for the Allied Forces, something that would give strength to the Armies of the Allies. I am convinced now that it is a misunderstanding, partly racial and partly religious. It is to the interest of both to have this misunderstanding removed, but there seems to have been some evil chance that frustrated every effort made for the achievement of better relations. I wish that that misunderstanding could be removed. I tried once. I did not succeed.

The fault was not entirely on one side. I felt the whole time that we were moving in an atmosphere of nervous suspicion and distrust, pervasive, universal, of everything and everybody. I was drenched with suspicion of Irishmen by Englishmen and of Englishmen by Irishmen, and, worst and most fatal of all, suspicion by Irishmen of Irishmen. It was a quagmire of distrust which clogged the footsteps and made progress impossible. That is the real enemy of Ireland. If that could be slain, I believe that it would accomplish an act of reconciliation that would make Ireland greater and Britain greater and would make the United Kingdom and the Empire greater than they ever were before. That is why I have always thought and said that the real solution of the Irish problem is largely one of the better atmosphere. I am speaking not merely for myself, but for my colleagues when I say that we shall strive to produce that better feeling.

We shall strive by every means and by many hazards to produce that atmosphere, and we ask men of all races, and men of all creeds and faith, to help us, not to solve a political question, but to help us

to do something that will be a real contribution to the winning of the War.

The achievements of the Navy speak for themselves. I do not think that anything I can say would be in the least adequate to recognise the enormous and incalculable services that the great Navy of Britain has rendered, not merely to the Empire, but to the whole Allied cause. Not merely would victory have been impossible, but the War could not have been kept on for two and a-half years had it not been for the services of the Navy. Now I come to the question of the Dominions. Ministers have repeatedly acknowledged the splendid assistance which the Dominions have given, of their own free will, to the old country in its championship of the cause of humanity. The great ideals of national fair play and justice appeal to the Dominions just as insistently as to us. They have recognised throughout that our fight is not a selfish one, and that it is not merely a European quarrel, but that there are great world issues involved which their children are as concerned in as our children. The new Administration are as full of gratitude as the old for the superb valour which our kinsmen have shown in so many stricken fields, but that is not why I introduce the subject now. I introduce the subject now because I want to say that we feel the time has come when the Dominions ought to be more formally consulted as to the progress and course of the War, as to the steps that ought to be taken to secure victory, and as to the best methods of garnering in the fruits of their efforts as well as of our own. We propose, therefore, at an early date to summon an Imperial Conference, to place the whole position before the Dominions, and to take counsel with them as to what further action they and we can take together in order to achieve an early and complete triumph for the ideals they and we have so superbly fought for.

As to our relations with the Allies—and this is the last topic I shall refer to—I ventured to say earlier in the year that there were two things we ought to seek as Allies—the first was, unity of aim; and the other, unity of action. The first we have achieved. Never have Allies worked in better harmony or more perfect accord than the Allies in this great struggle. There has been no friction and there has been no misunderstanding. But when I come to the question of unity of action, I still think that there is a good deal left to be desired. I have only got to refer to the incident of Roumania, and each man can spell out for himself what I mean. The enemy have got two advantages—two supreme advantages. One is that they act on internal lines, and the other is that there is one great dominant power that practically directs the forces of all. We have neither of these advantages. We must, therefore, achieve the same end by other means. The advantages we possess are advantages which time improves. No one can say that we have made the best of that time. There has been

a tardiness of decision and action. I forget who said about Necker that he was like a clock that was always too slow. There is a little of that in the great Alliance clock—Belgium, Serbia, Montenegro, Roumania.

Before we can take full advantage of the enormous resources at the command of the Allies, there must be some means of arriving at quicker and readier decisions, and of carrying them out. I believe that that can be done, and if we quicken our action as well as our decisions it will equalise the conditions more than we have succeeded in doing in the past. There must be more consultation, more real consultation, between the men who matter in the direction of affairs. There must be less of the feeling that each country has got its own front to look after. They have carried it so far that almost each Department might have a front of its own. The policy of a common front must be a reality. It is on the other side; Austrian guns are helping German infantry, and German infantry are stiffening Austrian arms. The Turks are helping Germans and Austrians, and Bulgarians mix with all. There is an essential feeling that there is but one front, and I believe we have got to get that more and more, instead of having overwhelming guns on one side, and bare breasts, gallant breasts, on the other. It is essential for the Allies not merely to realise that, but to carry it out in policy and action. I take this opportunity at the beginning of this new Administration of emphasising that point, because I believe it is the one essential for great victory, and for the curtailment of the period before victory arrives.

I end with one personal note, for which I hope the House will forgive me. May I say, and I say it in all sincerity, that it is one of the deepest regrets of my life that I should part from the right hon. Gentleman (Mr. Asquith). Some of his friends know how I strove to avert it. For years I served under the right hon. Gentleman, and I am proud to say so. I never had a kinder or more indulgent chief. If there were any faults of temper, they were entirely mine, and I have no doubt I must have been difficult at times. No man had greater admiration for his brilliant intellectual attainments, and no man was happier to serve under him. For eight years we differed as men of such different temperaments must necessarily differ, but we never had a personal quarrel, in spite of serious differences in policy, and it was with deep, genuine grief that I felt it necessary to tender my resignation to my right hon. Friend. But there are moments when personal and party considerations must sink into absolute insignificance, and if in this War I have given scant heed to the call of party, and so I have, although I have been as strong a party man as any in this House. If I have not done that during this War it is because I realised from the moment the Prussian cannon hurled death at a peaceable and inoffensive little country, that a challenge had been sent to civilisation to decide an issue higher than party, deeper

than party, wider than all parties—an issue upon the settlement of which will depend the fate of men in this world for generations, when existing parties will have fallen like dead leaves on the highway. Those issues are the issues that I want to keep in front of the nation, so that we shall not falter or faint in our resolve. There is a time in every prolonged and fierce war, in the passion and rage of the conflict, when men forget the high purpose with which they entered it. This is a struggle for international right, international honour, international good faith—the channel along which peace, honour and goodwill must flow amongst men. The embankment laboriously built up by generations of men against barbarism has been broken, and had not the might of Britain passed into the breach, Europe would have been inundated with a flood of savagery and unbridled lust of power. The plain sense of fair play amongst nations, the growth of an international conscience, the protection of the weak against the strong by the stronger, the consciousness that justice has a more powerful backing in this world than greed, the knowledge that any outrage upon fair dealing between nations, great or small, will meet with prompt and meritable chastisement—these constitute the causeway along which humanity was progressing slowly to higher things. The triumph of Prussia would sweep it all away and leave mankind to struggle helpless in the morass. That is why, since this War began, I have known but one political aim. For that I have fought with a single eye. That is the rescue of mankind from the most overwhelming catastrophe that has ever yet menaced its well-being.

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